Virginia Held and Nel Noddings theorize the ethics of care as a feminist principle. Mary Jeanette Moran has successfully applied their theories to children’s literature to demonstrate how principles such as being the one-caring, being the one cared-for, self-care, and cooperative identity formation have feminist implications in children’s literature.

This paper applies these theories to three variants of “The Little Mermaid”: Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid” (1837), Disney’s film The Little Mermaid (1989), and Miyazaki’s film Ponyo (2008). Although Achten has argued that Andersen’s original tale is less sexist than Disney’s rendition, Ponyo proves to be a specifically feminist text, especially when viewed through the lens of a feminist ethics of care. Ponyo and Sosuke are one-caring for each other; Sosuke’s mother cares for them both; and Ponyo shifts her subjectivity through a cooperative model (rather than a competitive model of self vs. other). Moreover, the film’s ecofeminist principles, articulated most clearly by Ponyo’s parents, demonstrate how ecofeminism is also built on a premise of feminist ethics of care. Fujimoto, Ponyo’s father, is particularly sensitive to the need for the earth’s seas and oceans to remain balanced for the Earth itself to be balanced.

In conclusion, the overall argument examines the interplay among various feminist theories relying on Miyazaki’s vast, oceanic film as an example.

Works cited


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